

Crib Goch

May I ask you a question?

It's just that it would be helpful to know where you are, helpful in the sense that if you are to understand where Brian Basset was, then knowing where you are, will help you understand Brian. I can tell you from the outset that Brian has been in several places in his life, some better than others, as you will discover.

Ha! I'm laughing a little because I guess you are thinking that I want to know where you are physically, such as in the bath, a rented room in Lowestoft with your lover or the cinema or even the David Hall Art Centre. No, no, no, what I want to know is far more esoteric. I want to know where you are on life's journey, are you still on its broad sunny uplands or on the knife edge. Ambling by the river Tees or scrambling on Crib Goch. It's important because I can assure you that some time you will find your own Crib Goch. As did Brian Basset.

Brian Basset, was a large man in form and in substance, over six feet in his stocking feet, well rounded with a ruddy complexion, he had the appearance of what most people would consider to be a farmer, which was just as well since that's what he was. He came from generations of farmers and he loved the life. From before he could remember he had helped birth lambs, milk cows and feed the sows. He thought fondly of the days riding aside his father on the tractors and combines, and with pride the day he was trusted to drive one on his own. All he ever wanted was to run his own farm.

He met Moira at the Farmers dance held in the barn of the larger farm across the valley. It was a Friday night he recalled and he was smitten from the second he saw her. He had never had a girlfriend and now here he was, at 20 years old, completely in love. He had stuttered and blushed when they first spoke and silently cursed himself for his lack of confidence and shyness. But something in him and her, some constellation of souls had coalesced and they were married within two years.

There first son and only child was born three years later and they named him Daniel after Moira's father. From early on he was a clone of his father, both in looks and temperament, hardworking, clever at school and keen on sport but knew that farming would be his life too. It was in his blood.

Brian's life was as perfect as any man could expect. He was running his own farm, had a beautiful wife who was as absorbed in the farm and family as he was, and a son who he adored.

Crib Goch is a knife edge arête in the Snowdonia National Park. The easiest way to approach it is via Cwm Glas.

When Moira first noticed the lump she was a little concerned but not enough to tell Brian, she discussed it with her best friend Kim and after three weeks or so decided to see the doctor. The doctor was fairly sure it was a cyst and arranged for a hospital outpatients appointment. Sometimes things seem to get out of hand far too quickly. The Doctors confidence was misplaced, severely so and she was soon under specialist attention with a very worried Brian at her side.

Moira died on Brians birthday at the age of 41

No man could have felt a wife's death as keenly as Brian, from having everything, he had lost his life time partner, and his emotions ranged from guilt to anger to self-pity. Daniel was 18 at the time of his mother's death. No one could help him deal with such a loss

The next year was one of tremendous sadness for them both but somehow together they kept going, working even harder on the farm to assuage their grief. The team of three was now two but she lived in their hearts and in everything they did she was there.

The very hard way to approach Crib Goch is via Bmlch y Moch known as the Foxes Path. It was a Thursday, a late winters day around 4pm and the light was fading, there is sometimes a certain slant of light on such afternoons, a certain foreboding in the coming darkness. A reason to be back inside the farmhouse and starting preparations for dinner. Since his mother's death Daniel had been the cook, something he enjoyed as a change from the farming. But this afternoon Daniel had to cut down a large ash tree that had started to die. He was a proficient tree surgeon and knew what he had to do. The coroner's office later decided that in the chain of the saw a link had become detached and the chain flailed back at Daniel, cutting his Carotid artery. He had bled to death within minutes and never made it even to the gate of the field.

As a writer there are no words I can use to describe that loss for Brian Basset. Some events are beyond words. He dissolved as a farmer, as a human being, he lost the will to live. He came close many times to using his shotgun to join his wife and son on the other side of the divide but the pride in his pain stayed him. He believed this was somehow what he deserved, a penance for something unknown to him. There was no rational in his grief. Friends, neighbours did what they could but he wasn't reachable in any human way. He lived, in so much as he breathed and ate and slept. If that is living then he did live, but joy was a foreign country. He never expected joy again and nor did he want it. Over the next three years the farm became an excuse for a farm, buildings left unrepaired, animals hardly fed and all the time his debts increasing. No one visited and if they tried were quickly rebuffed. There is a particular part of the Crib Goch ridge that falls into space, one wrong footing or a sudden gust of wind can send you falling irretrievably towards the valley below. Once past this threat, the path is more manageable.

The woman was a teacher from the school in the next valley, it was what is referred to as a special needs school and its pupils disadvantaged because of mental or physical impairment. In her thirty years of teaching it had been the most rewarding of places to work, she spent every day making a difference to young people's lives. Today was slightly different. She was visiting houses and farms seeking support for a new building they were hoping to construct. She had one of her pupils with her, ten years old and one of the woman's favourites. As she approached Brian Bassets farm she was struck by its run down state and sense of disrepair. She was 100 yards away from the house but Brian was out and glowering at her. She started her standard approach,

"Hello and nice to meet you, I'm from the school across the valley and we are looking for some support for our"

She got no further before Brian interrupted, almost shouting at her,

"No I don't want to give anything thank you and I don't want you to come back here again. Please leave"

The woman silently bent down and picked up her basket, she knew better than to argue with him or his sort. She grasped the child's hand firmly and turned to go, but the child resisted, looked again at Brian and spoke directly to him, as a child could, and as an adult wouldn't "Why are you so unhappy"

And that was the arrow. Direct at his heart, fired as only a child could, in innocence.

That arrow took him down. Down to his knees, hard on the concrete slabs, his arms holding his bowed head and only his sobs breaking the silence.

The woman hesitated, unsure how she should react, take the child and leave him to his grief or use the huge humanity she had and somehow help him. She walked over, put her hand on his heaving shoulder until it subsided.

Brian stood then, muttering apologies, his sleeve wiping his face leaving a streak of grime across his cheek. "Sorry, sorry" he kept repeating but she just guided his arm towards the house, the child holding her other hand.

"I will make us some tea"

That was the most rewarding cup of tea in a long while, certainly in Brian's life and possibly in hers.

It wasn't a conversation nor a confession nor a tale of heartache even, it was an explanation of love, love for his wife, love for his son and love for his lost life. And in the end it was a story of redemption.

That was of course some years ago and Brian and the woman met many times after that, Brian meeting other staff and becoming involved with the school.

If you were to visit Brian's farm now you would see a vibrant educational establishment, children helping with all sorts of farming jobs, teachers holding lessons in lambing sheds, visiting farmers helping with rural studies, students walking around with note pads on boards. Its reputation extends further even than its home county. It is a model of an educational farm and has been copied many times.

Brian died in 2020. He is buried on the farm. His headstone, close to where the child spoke to him, reads only six words,

Brian Bassett:
Husband, Father, Farmer, Teacher

By Stuart Nuttall